The *Arabian Nights* in English and Chinese Translations:
Differing Patterns of Cultural Encounter

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I

Introductory Remarks

In the 1980s a two-volume translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, called *Tian Fang Ye Tan*, appeared in Taipei. According to the general editor of 'world literature series' for Gueiguan Publishing Company, a PhD in comparative literature, it is a literary masterpiece worthy of canonization around the world.[1] The author of the 'readers guide', also a PhD in comparative literature, asserts the same but makes an interesting observation. In comparison with a six-volume translation from Burton published in Beijing in 1982, some say 1984, the Taipei version is in effect an adaptation. Many stories are now very different from the original. In fact, the structure of the original is no longer recognizable in the two-volume 'translation' published in Taipei. The frame-within-frame narrative structure of the original Arabic *Nights* has given way to discreet stories organized in a linear fashion but in no particular order.[2] This said, the two 'prefaces' assert, the distortions found in the Taipei version, however, should not prevent readers from enjoying the stories, getting a flavour of the *Nights* as a work of literary art from the 'Middle East'(referred to as *Tian Fang* in the title of Chinese translations) and learning about life in the medieval Arabic-Islamic society.

The two 'prefaces' to the Taipei translation hint at an interesting history of the Chinese translation, reception and assessment of the *The 1001 Nights* that transcends political boundaries and, more important, the contemporary theoretical binary—of colonized and

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[1] Wu Qienchen, 'Kuanlan huanqiu wenshue de qitsai kuangpu', *Tian Fang Ye Tan* (Taipei: Gueiguan, 1999 [1981, 1984, 1985, 1994, 1997]), i-viii.

[2] Su Qikang, 'Gushi zhong de gushi—Tian Fang Ye Tan', *Tian Fang Ye Tan* (Taipei: Gueiguan, 1999 [1981, 1984, 1985, 1994, 1997]), ix-xvii.

colonizer—in taking stock of, grappling with and coming to terms with cross-cultural encounters and exchanges. This history, which has yet to be thoroughly researched, mapped and written, opens up new vistas for the ways in which we may comprehend cross cultural encounters and exchanges. It demands that we re-theorize 'Orientalism' differently. In the first instance, how would we re-theorize 'Orientalism' in a case where cultural encounter occurs outside the colonizer-colonized framework and is, more often than not in the contemporary context, mediated by a third part. In another, second instance, how would we theorize 'translation' as a site of cross-cultural encounter and exchange? How would 'translation' refine and give nuance to our understanding of intercultural encounter that has thus far been narrowly located either in the dominant paradigm of 'Western' influence on the 'East' found in the all pervasive and overwhelming discourses on 'modernity' and 'modernization' of the 'East', or in the marginalized and underwhelming attempts at drawing attention to the instrumental role played by the 'Orient'—the culture of the 'East'—in what Raymond Schwab calls the 'Oriental Renaissance' in the 'West'.

The theoretical or analytical paradigms for the discussion of intercultural encounters I have mentioned above must, it goes without saying, be more specifically situated in the particular context of the machinery of production of knowledge located in Middle East Studies within 'Western' Academe which has been dominated by the imitative or antagonistic reverberations of Edward Said. Even translation—what texts get translated and how a text is translated—has not escaped the hegemony of these paradigms. What gets chosen for translation of how a text is transformed during translation are theorized as implicating an 'Orientalist' ideology operative behind production of knowledge, whether one is engaged with the scrutiny of market forces driving what Bourdieu calls 'field of cultural production', or of the intricate processes of thinking and making language choices behind a translated text. The findings seem to confirm Said's thesis that in the 'West' the 'East' is necessarily

explicitly or implicitly represented as its other, which representation is subject to its will to power, and that any kind of representation the powerful self makes of the powerless other, generally speaking, is willy-nilly seen as governed by a master-slave relationship, with the powerful doing all the distortions of the powerless. The translations of *The 1001 Nights* into English have not escaped this paradigm. Said has a particular axe to grind with Edward Lane and Richard Burton, whose English renditions of their respective *Arabian Nights* Said finds conforming to 'Orientalist' organization of knowledge and reductive of the 'Orient', their exoticizing and eroticizing of the Orient fanning their own fantasy of mastery of their subject, or their other.[3]

Although cultural theories have made inroads into interrogating and subverting Said's paradigm, giving more complex and nuanced discussions of the relation between 'East' and 'West',[4] they remain under the influence of, haunted by the paradigmatic binary of self and other, powerful and powerless, colonizer and colonized that lies at the heart of Said's

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[3] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978). The figures of Burton and Lane as 'Orientalists' cast long shadows on Said's text, which is pervaded with references to them, their travels to the Orient, their role in cultural and academic Orientalism, and the ways in which their translations of *The Thousand and One Nights* played into the Orientalist agenda of European imperialism.

[4] See, for example, Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jerry Brotton, *Trading Territories: Mapping the Early Modern World* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997) and *The Renassiance Bazaar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York and Houndmills, 2005); Jack Goody, *The East in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art Between East and West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000); Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996) and *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); Gerald MacLean, *Re-Orienting the Renaissance: Cultural Exchanges with the East* (New York and Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992); Geoffrey Nash, *From Empire to Orient: Travellers to the Middle East 1830-1926* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005); and Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

'Orientalism' and subsequent post-colonial theories and studies.[5] Is there no way out of this intellectual impasse? From our personal experiences, especially those of 'Arabists' and 'Orientalists' tell us that the ways in which we—intellectuals, scholars, academics, writers, artists, even hunters for the exotic—respond to our cultural other(s) varyingly, contradictorily, complexly, and not always informed by our will to power in the same fashion, especially those of us who are multi-lingual and multi-cultural. Whether we are powerful or powerless, we do not always desire to dominate the other; sometimes we even prefer to give in to the power, or allure, of the other even if the other is powerless. And then, how do we understand and define power, really? I do not want to belabour these points here. I would instead pursue a line of inquiry that, I hope to show, is more productive for understanding and analyzing processes of cultural encounter and exchange and, more importantly, the attendant production of knowledge. I want to move away from the contentious and contested area of Middle East studies so caught up in preoccupations with power and power relations, understandably given the recent colonial history that continues to exert its influence on the region, and shift focus to a site where the power and its machinery has less immediate affect on defining the relationship between two different cultures.

I place emphasis on difference because it is the very assumption that lurks beneath any discussion of intercultural encounters. It seems to lay at the heart of contentions and contestations, at least in discussions of the relations between the 'Western world' and the Middle East, the world of 'Araby'.[6] What lessons would we learn from another experience of intercultural encounter, that of the Middle East and China, two equally formidable empire

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[5] See, for example, Sylvette Larzul's discussion of French translations of *The Thousand and One Nights* in *Les traductions françaises des Mille et une nuits : étude des versions Galland, Trébutien et Mardrus* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), and 'Les Mille et une nuits d'Antoine Galland: traduction, adaptation, creation', *Les Mille et Une Nuits en partage*, ed. Aboubakr Chraibi (Paris: Sindbad Actes Sud, 2004), 251-266.

[6] A term used to refer to the Middle East in medieval England. See Dorothee Metlizki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

complexes. The cultural traffic between these two 'imperial' cultures, mediated by the

Arabic and Chinese languages, has never really come to a halt, not in the past despite the

distance or at present despite the ascendance of the 'West' and the 'eclipse' of the 'rest'. I

will look at the reception of *The 1001 Nights* in Chinese, but always in comparison with

English translations, and use the lessons I shall learn from this endeavour to re-think the

theoretical and analytical paradigm derived from Said's *Orientalism,* often to the detriment of

his intellectual rigour and profound humanism, and put forward in an array of less-than-

carefully-thought-out post-colonial studies informed by knee-jerk impulses for decolonization,

offensively or defensively, a majority of the Middle Easterners' eagerness to condemn

'Western' machinery of power and the 'wrongs' it has done to and in the 'East',[7] and a

minority of Westerners' earnestness in unravelling Said's scholarship, therefore, the

intellectual threads in *Orientalism*, pointing to the admiring intentions of the Orientalists,

their positive attitude towards the 'East'[8] and, more importantly, the centrality of the 'Orient'

in 'Western' modernity.

The reception of the *Nights* in Chinese may not be a typical example of the encounter

between Arabic and Chinese because, unlike their pre-modern relations, it is today mediated

by a 'distant' third party, the 'West' or, more particularly, Europe; for the popularity of *The

1001 Nights* in Europe was what prompted the Chinese to translate the stories from European

languages but perhaps not until 1900, even though European, especially English translations

of the *Nights* must have been available in China at the latest by 1870, when *Kelly and Walsh*,

the first foreign bookshop, was founded in Shanghai. The Japanese, who translated the

Nights into Japanese from as early as 1875, seemed to rely on *Kelly and Walsh* got their

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[7] See, for example, Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1986), revised as *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (London: Pandora, 1994).

[8] See, for example, Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

supply of European books. Tanizaki Jun'inchiro (1886-1965), one of the most celebrated novelists in first part of the twentieth century in Japan, makes a reference to the role of *Kelly and Walsh* in making available English translations of the *Nights.* In the sixth chapter of *Tade kuu mushi* (Some Perfect Nettles, 1929), the protagonist of his novel, Shiba Kaname, 'receives a complete set of Burton's edition as a gift from his friend Takanatsu, who has just returned from Shanghai. Takanatsu tells him how hard it was for him to get it there at *Kelly and Walsh*… and bring it back to Japan'.[9] The implication of 'Europe' in the spread, translation and reception of an Arabic work in Chinese is precisely why it would be interesting, and hopefully edifying, to look at this encounter. For despite the surface resemblance of the trajectory of Chinese translation and reception of *The 1001 Nights* to its European counterpart, the translated texts, upon close scrutiny, tell a different story.

II

Orientalism by Proxy?:

The 1001 Nights in Chinese

As in the West, *The 1001 Nights*, famous and popular among the Chinese, is known as children's stories. In fact, an abridged version of *The 1001 Nights* called *Tian Fang Ye Tan* was the first story book I ever read when I was learning Chinese in Libya as a child. *Tian Fang,* as I have already mentioned, is the 'classical' Chinese term for a region that is perhaps best conveyed by the medieval English term 'Araby'.[10] *Ye Tan* means night talk, nothing like serious discussion but more like 'table talk', or casual exchange of news and stories, or simply chatter. 'Sindbad the Sailor' and 'Aladdin and the Magic Lamp' are the two most

[9] See Hideaki Sugita, 'The *Arabian Nights* in Modern Japan: A Brief Historical Sketch', *The Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West*, ed. Yuriko Yamanaka and Tetsuo Nishio (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 116-153, 138.

[10] Su Qikang, 'Gushi zhong de gushi—*Tian Fang Ye Tan*', *Tian Fang Ye Tan* (Taipei: Gueiguan, 1999 [1981, 1984, 1985, 1994, 1997]), ix-xvii, ix.

memorable stories that I recall with fondness even today. When asked about *Tian Fang Ye Tan*, any Chinese would immediately reply, 'oh, yes, the famous children's stories from the Arab world'. This is how *The 1001 Nights* is popularly known in Chinese. There are innumerable versions and editions of children's *Tian Fang Ye Tan*, all attributed to an anonymous 'Arab' author, '*yi ming*', and come in a plethora of shapes and sizes with little or next to no information on the sources and 'authors'—compilers and translators—of the volumes. There is even less accounting for why some stories are chosen and others left out.

The 1001 Nights* found its way into Chinese as early as 1900, most likely through translations from European languages, especially Burton in English (1885-88).   A Zhou Gueishen translated a selection of stories from the *Nights* in 1900, which he called *Yi Qian Lin Yi Ye*.[11] I also found a record of a four-volume translation by a Xi Rou published in Shanghai in 1906 during a search of Chinese Union Library Catalogue. These and other translations as well as adaptations from translations and adaptations from adaptations, all invariably given the titles *Tian Fang Ye Tan* or *Yi Qian Lin Yi Ye,* have been in continuous production until today.   There is, it seems, a steady stream of *Arabian Nights* books in Chinese throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. *Tian Fang Ye Tan* is practically a literal translation of *Arabian Nights entertainments* including the archaic and exotic 'twang', or slant Burton has given the *Nights* in his translation. This is not to say that the Chinese do not know of Antoine Galland, Edward Lane or John Payne—these names are all mentioned in the various introductions to the various Chinese 'texts' I have at my disposal at present. There is also the possibility of translating from Japanese translations, especially in Taiwan, a former Japanese colony, where early multi-volume Japanese translations (as early as 1875) may have been known and available. It is all very difficult to know at present. For one thing, more

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[11] See Li Weizhong's 'Introduction' to his 2000 translation directly from Bulaq published electronically on the publisher, Yuan Liu's website: http://www.ylib.com/search/pre_show.asp?BookNo=P3022.

research is needed before any conclusion can be reached, and for another, what is available in the market never tallies with academic pronouncements, mainly in introductions to various Chinese versions, which are given not by specialists in Arabic or Middle Eastern Studies but by comparative literature academics working primarily in the areas of European literatures, clearly dominated by the Anglophile, even when it comes to transmission and dissemination of translations from the Arabic original.

In the 1930s, during Chinese resistance to Japanese occupation, another stream of translations from the Arabic 'original', primarily Bulaq, began to appear under the title *Yi Qian Lin Yi Ye*, a literal translation of the Arabic 'one thousand and one nights'. Two names emerge as 'heroes' of such an enterprise. A Mr. Na Xun, apparently a Chinese Muslim, who made a five-volume translation in the 1930s known at the time as *Tian Fang Ye Tan*. In the 1950s a three-volume translation by the same Mr. Na appeared as *Yi Qian Lin Yi Ye*. Finally, a six-volume translation, a complete translation according to his Beijing publisher, appeared in 1982. This 1982 Beijing edition by Na Xun is the source text of the two-volume Taipei edition I have mentioned purportedly translated by a Zhong Si. Zhong, according to 'readers' guide' written by a Su Qikang, associate professor of English literature at Zhongshan University, at most edited Na's translation, restructured the work and reorganized the stories. Zhong's translation, however, has been very popular.[12] There is a continuous demand for it since it first appeared in 1981. It is at least in its sixth reprint (81, 84, 85, 94, 97 and 99). And finally a ten-volume translation of the Bulaq text was made by now professor of Arabic at Beijing's Language Institute, Li Weizhong, was published in Taipei in 2000. It was apparently a limited edition and is now out of print. This translation is given the title of *Yi Qian Lin Yi Ye*.

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[12] Su Qikang, 'Gushi zhong de gushi—Tian Fang Ye Tan', *Tian Fang Ye Tan* (Taipei: Gueiguan, 1999 [1981, 1984, 1985, 1994, 1997]), ix-xvii, xii.

From this very brief and sketchy overview, one may infer that Chinese translation of *The 1001 Nights* comes after and follows the trajectory of European reception of the *Nights*, echoing the European popular reception, its recent scholarship, academic priorities and intellectual agenda. From importing it as children's literature, then elevating it to a masterpiece of world literature, to eventual insistence on identifying that one source text for translation despite an awareness of the *Nights* as a cross-cultural composite work, and finally using it as a 'text' to introduce the 'wonderful' and 'fantastic' world of Arabic-Islamic civilization in a 'political correct' global environment that insists on placing some emphasis on an 'education' in non-'Western' cultures and histories.[13] In 2005 book on the history and civilization of the 'Arab World', *Ah La Puo*, appeared under the title *Yi Qian Lin Yi Ye*, with the additional subtitle of *The Arabian Nights* in English. This book, pitched for the popular market, purports to take the reader in a tour, or 'promenade', *san pu*, of the civilization of Araby in the company of one of the 'classics', 'masterpieces', or even 'scriptures', *jin dian*, of the world. This book, I dare say, goes against the regular grain of books about the Arab world and Arabs in town. While it attempts to extol what it calls 'Arabic civilization', the knowledge it imparts is contradictory. It smacks of the kind of uncritical, popular 'Orientalism' one finds often in American and British bookstores, where Arab(ic), Persian and Turkish, not to mention others, are lumped together without distinction. And, at the end of the book, pages on belly-dancing, tea, bread and 'Arab' terrorism, all adorned with photographic clips, are added as a way of introducing the reader to the contemporary Arab world. The illustrations accompanying the book are made up of 'Oriental' and 'Orientalist' materials haphazardly distributed across the visual landscape of the book usually without explanation. If I may be crude here for the sake of brevity and clarity, what one finds is

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[13] I have not found any reference to *The 1001 Nights* as 'adult' (pornographic) literature in Chinese. This does not necessarily mean there is no bifurcation of *The 1001 Nights* into 'children's literature' and 'adult literature', as in the Japanese case, but rather that at the present stage of my research I have not found similar evidence.

wholesale importation of the kind of 'vulgar', mainly 'kitch' Orientalism or Orientalia one finds in the 'West'. The emphasis on 'Araby's' cultural difference from the 'Middle Kingdom', or China, even though this difference is never particularized; it belongs to the kind of fuzzy difference that also distinguishes the rest of the world, past and present, from China, from Chinese culture, or what one may call 'self-defining othering'. This comes across most strikingly in the illustrations found in the Chinese translations, the 'styles' of which are invariably borrowed from a hodgepodge of 'Islamic', 'Biblical', 'Ancient Greek', Medieval European traditions of 'miniatures', and more often than not, from recent Japanese or European 're-fabrications' of these traditions.

But can we trust this 'contextual' inference of what I would call 'Orientalism by Proxy' as inherent in Chinese translation, both as a field of cultural production and as an instance of textual migration? What I mean by 'Orientalism by Proxy' is the migration of 'Western' Orientalism into Chinese view of the Islamic Middle East, especially 'Araby', that defines the 'civilized' self against an other that is both exoticized and eroticized, that fits into a stereotype of 'the noble savage', 'less civilized' other or 'religious' other,[14] or that rationalizes cultural change, modernization in this case, by projecting the otherness of the past onto the 'non-West',[15] or that opens up a cultural space for certain freedoms by deferring taboo issues to another site.[16] If I have read into the Chinese translations of the *Nights*, in this case as a cultural field of production, the Orientalist impulses so familiar in Said's works and in the current frenetic 'Orientalism' industry, would I find corroboration in the Chinese

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[14] See Sylvette Larzul, 'Les Mille et une nuits d'Antoine Galland: traduction, adaptation, creation', *Les Mille et Une Nuits en partage*, ed. Aboubakr Chraibi (Paris: Sindbad Actes Sud, 2004), 251-266

[15] See John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York and Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillans, 2005).

[16] See Robert L. Mack, 'Introduction', *Oriental Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

translations of *The 1001 Nights*, in the *Nights'* texts transformed during and through their travel into another culture, another language? I will look at one example.

III

The Travels of 'Ma'ruf the Cobbler'

I begin my own journey of discovery with the 'Story of Ma'ruf the Cobbler'. I choose this story for a number of reasons. The central motif of the story may serve as a metaphor for what I have been thinking of with regards to translation. When a text is translated from one language to another it migrates, leaving a home culture behind in order to find a new home in another culture, which entails living a new life. However, what is left behind, even when successful domestication into the new home occurs, can rear its ugly head and haunt the migrant. Ma'ruf runs away from his monstrosity of a wife, Fatima al-'Arra, leaves her behind in Cairo, finds a new home in Ikhtiyan al-Khatan, marries the King's daughter and settles happily there, only to have his wife come after him. Put differently, a successfully translated text is often that which is domesticated into a new culture—that behaves like a native in a new language—while it retains traces from its past in another culture, another language. More important, the two Chinese translations I have located for this story,[17] what the *Nights* scholarship calls 'additional' or 'orphan' story found only in Bulaq and Mcnaugten, are purportedly from an original Arabic text, most likely Bulaq (but the differences between Bulaq and Mcnaughten is insignificant in this case). In addition to comparing Arabic and Chinese versions, I will also bring into the equation the available English translations[18] and see from a comparative perspective outside a binary what actually

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[17] *Tian Fang Ye Tan*, in two volumes, tr. Zhong Si (Taipei: Gueikaun, 1993), 2: 1223-1289; and *Tian Fang Ye Tan: One Thousand and One Nights*, in one volume, tr. Zhi Fuhao (Taipei: Zhou Shang, 2005), 518-540.

[18] Richard Burton, *The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night*, in ten volumes (1886), 10: 1-53; *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*, in one volume, tr. N. J. Dawood (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 372-404; and

goes on in the processes of translation, at the ways in which signs are structured similarly or differently in two or three distinct semiological systems that give way to meanings the respective language users may comprehend within their particular linguistic culture (or culture of language use), which may in turn be simultaneously multiple in general (subject to heteroglossia) and individualized in particular (determined by the workings of subject that cannot be theorized). There are two areas of interest I would like tackle: one is premised on, located in and expressive of difference, and the other sameness.

In the first instance, how does a linguistic culture unfamiliar with monotheism convey the idea of one true God and the ways in which it has structured a semiological system and spawned a 'tradition' of story-telling informed by and steeped in a system of faith that has ramifications even in the minute belief in angels and genies?   The idea of one, omnipresent and omnipotent God, Allah, is perhaps less difficult a concept for audiences brought in monotheism, such as Christians and Jews, to grasp than the Chinese readers of *The 1001 Nights*, for there is no equivalent monotheism in Chinese religions. The idea one God today may be more readily comprehended by the Chinese familiar with the monotheistic traditions—and most educated Chinese are—through translating 'Allah' into 'the True Lord' (*zheng zhu*). However, how do Chinese and languages cope with signs that carry the weight of an entire cultural tradition constructed around this, let us say, mega-sign, which in turn structures into a worldview, and in an extremely intricate fashion, innumerable signs adopted and adapted from a variety of, let us say again, indigenous and foreign sources, only to spawn a new complex web of cultural traditions?   In this case, in what ways do the two semiological systems embodied in the Chinese and English languages comprehend genies and their place, role and status in the Islamic worldview peculiar to Arabic vernacular fiction,

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The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights, in three volumes, tr. Malcolm C. Lyons (London: Penguin, 2008), 3: 690-730.

a site on which pre-Islamic myths and traditions (including Biblical traditions), albeit

transformed in Islam,[19] feature prominently? Put differently, is it possible to make sense,

fully, of the role the genie plays in informing the worldview, structure, narrative trajectory,

and significance of an Arabic story in Chinese and English? In the second instance, where it

is relatively safe to assume sameness in a number of cultures, such as social etiquette

informing conduct of men and women in society and structuring women-men relationships, is

full equivalence possible? Or, in this particular story, does patriarchy manifest itself in the

same manner across cultures, and does it have it identical expressions of patriarchal women?

IV

Difference: Religious Worldview

'The story of Ma'ruf the Cobbler' is, according to Peter D. Molan, a morality tale

with a mythic structure, 'a ring of composition so typical of mythic lore' that may be

summarized as a tripartite flight-trial-return form.[20] Ma'ruf, a poor but honourable cobbler, is

unhappily married to a shrew, Fatimah al-'Arrah. On a particular bad day, he fails to bring

her *kunafah* pastry dripped in honey she takes him to the local court, falsely accusing him of

wife beating. Even though he is judged innocent, he is forced to sell his tools. Even angrier,

Fatimah files a further complaint with the governor. When Ma'ruf learns that the governor's

agents, always harsh and violent in their dealings with the poor, are coming for him, he flees

in terror. He arrives at the ruins of a mosque and starts weeping. A genie, disturbed by the

noise, appears and takes him far away from his wife to a city called Ikhtiyan al-Khatan upon

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[19] For an example of ideological transformation in the stories of *The 1001 Nights*, see Aboubakr Chraibi, 'Texts of the *Arabian Nights* and Ideological Variations', *New Perspectives on The Arabian Nights: Ideological Variations and Narrative Horizons*, ed. Wen-chin Ouyang and Geert Jan van Gelder (London: Routledge, 2005), 17-26.

[20] Peter D. Molan, 'Ma'ruf the Cobbler: The Mythic Structure of an *Arabian Nights* Tale', *Edebiyat* 3 (1978), 121-135, 127.

hearing Ma'ruf's tale of woe. There, the penniless and homeless Ma'ruf chances upon an older neighbour from Cairo. This old neighbour is now one of the rich merchants of Ikhtiyan al-Khatan comes to Ma'ruf's aid. He advices Ma'ruf to pretend to be a rich merchant, to borrow money against a shipment of goods he would claim to be on its way, and to trade with borrowed money. He even lends him a sum of money and goes so far as to fit him with an appropriate suit and a mule and introduce him to all the other merchants of the city. Ma'ruf, however, uses the money to help the poor in the city. Despite the grumblings of the merchants, who are now impatient to have their money back, Ma'ruf's reputation as a rich and generous man reaches the greedy king of the city. He marries his daughter to Ma'ruf, despite the objections of his vizier, who too has designs on princess and her father's kingdom.

Shortly after their marriage, especially when the pressures on him to repay his debts and pay the princess's dowry to the king, Ma'ruf confides in his new wife. The princess lends him money and sends him into hiding but tells the king that her husband has gone to meet his caravan. This time, Ma'ruf is taken in by a farmer during his flight. When the farmer is away one day to find food, he decides to help by ploughing the land. He comes upon a subterranean vault divided into chambers filled with gold and precious stones. More importantly, he finds a seal ring engraved with mysterious talismans. He rubs it and a genie, Abu al-Sa'adat, appears. The genie is the servant of the ring and the ring owner. Ma'ruf commands him to move the treasures to Ikhtiyan al-Khatan and is happily reunited with Dunya. His happiness is rudely interrupted by the scheming vizier, who gets him drunk one night, finds out his secret, steals his ring, banishes Ma'ruf and the king, and sets himself up to marry the princess and seize the Kingdom. The princess pretends to agree to welcome the advances of the 'evil' vizier and steals the ring from him through a ruse and brings home her father and husband. She keeps the ring until she dies. It is at this juncture, close to the end of the story, that Fatimah, his first wife, unfortunately finds her way to Ma'ruf, humbled by

poverty and repentant. Too soft hearted to turn her way, Maʿruf sets her up in her own palace. She proves ungrateful and tries to steal his ring. Maʿruf's son happens to come by, sees her, and kills her. Happiness finally arrives for Maʿruf. When he takes gifts to thank the farmer who helped him earlier in the story, he finds his beautiful daughter and marries her. In due time, he also finds a bride for his son and everyone live happily ever after.

The story, Molan argues, is a variant of the great 'mono-myth' of the kind Joseph Campbell studies in his works that sums up in its tripartite structure—flight-trial-return—the quest of the riddle of life. Maʿruf, faced with the culmination of evil in life, Fatimah who symbolizes the eminence of death, flees, answering reluctantly the 'call to adventure'. He approaches the 'threshold of adventure' when he arrives at the ruins of an old mosque. With the help of the genie, he arrives at Ikhtiyan al-Khatan, crossing the threshold and into a supernatural world. Once magically settled, Maʿruf is aided three times: by the merchant ʿAli, by the princess, and by the supernatural being, Abu al- Saʿadat. The aid is in each case wealth, and in an increasing fashion. Each grant of aid, however, is the 'test', or 'trial' to see how Maʿruf will handle something of great value. He fails to abide by 'moderation in all things' each time, squandering his wealth away, not because the causes are wrong—aiding the poor is honourable—but because he is imprudently excessive. The supreme test comes when he obtains 'the ultimate talisman', the magic ring. He is seduced into further excess— drinking too much wine this time—and risks losing his wife and kingdom. 'It is only here that Maʿruf realizes his folly', Molan asserts, 'and learns his lesson. Here at the nadir of the mythological journey, Maʿruf finally understands and receives his reward. He is reunited with the Princess and attains the prudent and proper use of the magic ring. It is now that his marriage, which had already taken place, becomes fruitfully consummated' (130). To Molan,

The fruitful consummation of the marriage represents the structurally necessary "sacred marriage" element of schema [of a mythological journey]. The structurally necessary

flight theme in the Ma'ruf tale, then, is represented by Ma'ruf's dual transformation into father and widower. Ma'ruf's son is the symbol of Ma'ruf's regeneration and this theme is further carried out as the tale progresses. The death of Princess Dunya is the hero's return out of the underworld. His helper must be left behind, as he and his alter-ego son go forward. In our version, the world comes miraculously back to Ma'ruf with the reappearance of Fatimah. Thus, the threshold of the real world is recrossed; but it is a new Ma'ruf who faces the real world. He warns Fatimah that he is changed and will surely kill her if she crosses him. At first he is cowed; but the world is unchanged, and she attempts to steal the ring, the symbol of Ma'ruf's new power and understanding— indeed, of his new life. But the world no longer has dominion over the new Ma'ruf. The terror of death immanent in life are allayed symbolically in the slaying of Fatimah by Ma'ruf's new self—his son' (131).

The 'moral lesson' Molan speaks of is imparted through the structuration of the narrative in the form of a mythological journey as well as the saturation of the language of the story with Islamic symbols of loss as a result of excess. The main plot of 'the Story of Ma'ruf the Cobbler' takes off from popular Arabic-Islamic lore with roots in the pre-Islamic past, the *asatir al-awwalin* (myths or legends of the ancients)[21] that found their way into the Qur'an and the *qisas al-anbiya'* (stories of the prophets) in both the Qur'an and a multivalent body of storytelling outside the Qur'an and the historical and exegetical tradition of *qisas al-nabiya'*.[22] 'Ma'ruf the Cobbler' combines elements from the legends of pre-Islamic tribes of 'Ad (mentioned alongside Thamud and Pharaoh as Burton points out in a footnote) and 'The

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[21] For a quick reference of these myths and legends, see Muhammad 'Ajinah, *Mawsu'at asatir al-'arab 'an al-jahiliyyah wa dalalatiha*, in two volumes (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1994).

[22] For a comprehensive discussion of the presence, integration and transformation of these pre-Islamic legends into the Qur'an and *Qisas al-Anbiya'*, see Muhammad Karim al-Kawwaz, *Min asatir al-awwalin ila qisas al-anbiya'* (Beirut: al-Intishar al-'Arabi, 2006).

Story of Solomon' from *Qisas al-Anbiya*',[23] his ring in particular. 'Ad, a powerful tribe at the time of Noah and Hud, was punished and made extinct for their treatment of the prophets, their tyranny and disregard for Allah's calls to faith.[24] The 'city of many columns' (*dhat iram*) built by Shaddad Ibn 'Ad, mentioned once in the Qur'an, appears in the 'stories of the prophets'[25] and in *The 1001 Nights* in many guises, all evocative of the vicissitudes of time and fragility of life and extolling patience and endurance. The splendour may remain, but life necessarily comes to an end.[26] The real turning point in Ma'ruf's life occurs when he finds and takes control of 'Solomon's ring', now poignantly attributed to Shaddad Ibn 'Ad, perhaps as an double reminder of the necessity of virtue and, more importantly, of remembrance that this is the Omnipotent God's command; for Solomon, with all his powers and mastery of the non-human world, including birds, animals plants and genies, is like Shaddad Ibn 'Ad, no longer with us.

There is an episode in 'the Story of Solomon' that particularly resonates with 'the Story of Ma'ruf the Cobbler'. Solomon too loses his ring, in which all his power resides, for forty days, the duration of one of his wives' transgression of the most sacred Islamic edict to 'worship no God but Allah'. Jaradah misses her father and asks to have some his clothes. She then uses them to make an effigy of her father, which she worships for forty days. When Solomon finds out, he abstains from life and goes into the desert to worship God for forty

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[23] For *Arabian Nights'* intertextual engagement with these stories, see 'Abdallah Taj, *Masadir "alf laylah wa laylah" al-'arabiyyah* (Susah: Dar al-Mizan li l-Nashr, 2006).

[24] See, for example, Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Qisas al-anbiya'*, extracted from *Tarikh al-rusul wa al-muluk* by Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1989), 109, 118-131; and Abu al-Fida' Ibn Kathir, *Qisas al-anbiya'*, extracted from *Al-bidayah wa al-nihayah* by Sidqi Jamil al-'Attar (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1998), 93-106).

[25] See Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn 'Abdallah al-Kisa'i, *Bad' al-khalq aw Qisas al-anbiya'*, ed. Al-Tahir b. Salimah (Tunis: Dar Nuqush 'Arabiyyah, 1998), 167-179; and Abu Ishaq Ahmad Ibn Muhammad al-Tha'labi, *Qisas al-anbiya' al-musamma bi al-'ara'is al-majalis* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1347 A.H.), 99-102.

[26] See Andras Hamori, 'An Allegory from the *Arabian Nights*: The City of Brass', *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 145-63; reprinted in *The Arabian Nights Reader*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 283-297.

days. This is, however, not enough, and one day a recalcitrant genie steals his ring, which Solomon leaves with a trusted servant whenever he spends the night with a wife in order not to taint it. Solomon is bereft of his ring, his power, for another forty days, during which the evil genie rules in his place and he wandered along a sea like a madman, feeding on the fish he catches. Finally, the genie throws the ring into the sea and it is swallowed by a fish Solomon catches.[27] With the recovery of his ring, Solomon returns to power. Ma'ruf follows the same trajectory, albeit twice, in losing and recovering the magic ring. The culprits in the two stories are similarly punished by death.

Clearly, the symbolic weight of the two signs, references to Shaddad Ibn 'Ad and Iram Dhat al-'Imad, and to Solomon and the temporary loss of his ring, cannot easily be conveyed in another language, a different semiological system uninformed by the web of signs (signifiers-> signifieds), or words that embody myths, spawned in the Arabic language. At the outset, the parodic effect of the name given to the servant of the ring, Abu al-Sa'adat (father of fortunes), is unavoidably lost not only in translation but also transliteration. Burton's footnote, giving it the meaning of 'father of prosperities', come closest to an awareness of its significance in the story; Abu al-Sa'adat is indeed the father of Ma'ruf's good fortunes. Furthermore, even though the English language shares the Biblical tradition with Arabic, the symbolisms of the same stories are not identical in Arabic and English. The absence of this equivalence is especially evident in the divergent translations of the various sub-species of the genies mentioned by Abu al-Sa'adat in his significance-setting conversation with Ma'ruf (See Appendix I and II). In one Chinese translation (Zhi), this key passage is omitted (See Appendix III). As a result the broader context of the story, which is fundamental to an understanding of the worldview framing the story I have already discussed above is entirely lost.

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[27] See al-Tabari, 371-375; al-Kisa'i, 356-357; and al-Tha'labi, 224-227.

Genie is, for example translated into *jin lin* in Chinese, which may sound like genie but is in reality a translation of 'fairy', as in 'Tinkle Bell' of *Peter Pan* fame, using two characters familiar to readers of Chinese stories, *jin* meaning non-human creatures that can sometimes transmogrify into humans, and *lin* meaning a kind of knowledge that goes beyond reason and empiricism. In the other translation, the more popular Zhong Si version, the dialogue between Ma'ruf and the genie in which the latter tells Ma'ruf about who he is and the where the treasures come from is translated in full. However, it makes no sense of the world of genies in the 'stories of the prophets' or *The 1001 Nights* to those who come from an Islamic cultural background or who are familiar with Arabic story-telling. This is how Abu al-Sa'adat introduces himself to Ma'ruf in Zhong's Chinese (rendered into English):

> I am the king of gods (*sheng wang*) who protects the ring in your hand… I rule over 72 tribes (*qiu zu*), each tribe of 72 thousand tribesmen. Each tribesman rules over 1000 giants, and each giant over 1000 slave, and each slave in turn rules over 1000 earth gods (*tu di sheng*).

I have quoted three terms in Chinese here because they have no correspondence in Arabic or English. I have translated *qiu zu* as tribe, which is only somewhat accurate. It is a term used in Chinese to refer to non-Han nomadic 'nations', which implies race. As for *sheng wang* and *tu di sheng*, you will notice that the two terms have one character in common, that is *sheng*, which means a kind god who can rank high or low as a member of the Chinese pantheon. It never denotes the omniscient, omnipresent monotheistic God who just is and rules supreme. *Sheng* is rather a rank a human being can achieve by being virtuous in this life in popular Chinese beliefs—and there are three systems of belief in Chinese: Buddhist, Taoist and let us say popular for the lack of a better word. He is the 'spirit' of someone who lives on after death in a kind of upper world and is given power, and at times armies, to help maintain justice in the human world. So, there is such notion of 'king of gods'. *Sheng* is

usually juxtaposed to *guei*, a ghost, the spirit of someone evil condemned to live forever in the dark in a kind of nether world. *Tu di sheng* is a very low ranking god given the task of protecting a small lot of land. Taipei is littered with temples erected for these local gods.

The Islamic lore of genies and their organization as parallel to humanity, most clearly spelt out in 'the Story of Solomon' and reiterated in *The 100 Nights*, is domesticated into Chinese culture, becoming in the process integrated into the popular Chinese pantheon. This form of domestication by transforming an 'alien' belief system into a 'familiar' one makes sense especially if the translation is to be successful; for in this way the translation strikes a familiar chord with its audience even as it takes them on an adventure in a new world that is far from exotic but rather looks, feels and sounds quite familiar. Sameness is what makes difference palatable, edible and digestible. Does this explain Zhong Si's popularity? If this is what happens to difference, then what becomes of sameness? Let me now turn to my second example, which has to do with notions of womanhood.

V

Sameness: Social Etiquette

Ma'ruf's two homes are defined, one may argue, by his relationship with his two wives and the role they play in his life. His first wife, Fatimah al-'Arrah, is ugly, nasty, crafty, dishonest, violent and destroyer of men, his second wife, the princess of Ikhtiyan al-Khatan, is beautiful, intelligent, supportive and maker of kings. Ma'ruf's escape from Cairo is precipitated by Fatimah's nastiness. She even catches up with him after his second wife's death, she tries to steal his ring and kill him. His second wife, the princess, is her exact opposite. Once she is married, she becomes loyal to her husband. When she finds out the truth of his identity, she gives him money and sends him so that he would escape a certain

punishment. He understandably comes back to her when he finds Shaddad Ibn 'Ad's treasures. When the 'evil' vizier gets him drunk, steals his ring, sends him and later the king off to 'nowhere', she pretends to want to marry him, then kicks him in the chest and face, takes away her husband's ring from the vizier, brings back her husband and farther, gives birth to a beautiful son, and is instrumental in Ma'ruf's inheriting kingship, all this while keeping the ring safe for her husband. These two 'archetypal' women represent two sides of a coin that is womanhood and, in this particular case, physical beauty is synonymous with virtue.

Fatimah's nickname, al-'Arrah, is a double-entendre. Read al-'Arrah in the classical register, it means to be a shame or a disgrace, or to bring shame or disgrace, and pronounced al-'Urrah, it then means mange or scabies or dung. She is described as '*fajirah sharraniyyah qalilat al-haya' kathirat al-fitan*'(6: 653).[28] Burton, Dawood and Lyons could not quite convey the implication and signification of these adjectives in their respective translations. Lyons translates these telling adjectives as: 'His wife, Fatima, was an evil-minded, vicious and shameless intriguer who was nicknamed "Dung"' (3: 690). Dawood renders it blandly as, 'He was married to a spiteful termagant called Fatimah, nicked by her neighbours 'the shrew' on account of her sour disposition and scolding tongue' (372). Burton comes closer in 'and he had a wife called Fatimah, whom the folk had nicknamed "the Dung"; for that she was a whorish, worthless wretch, scanty of shame and mickle of mischief' (10: 1). There is a skewed focus on interiority in English translation. They give a sense that these adjectives describe the nature of Fatimah, thus defining her relationship with Ma'ruf, which is abuse on her part and fear on his. Lyons sees that 'She dominated her husband, and every day she would hurl abuse and a thousand curses at him, while for his part he was afraid of her evil nature and of the harm that she might do him. He was a sensible man, anxious to protect his

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[28] References are made to *Alf laylah wa laylah*, reprint of Bulaq in six volumes (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1999).

honour, but he was poor' (3: 690). In Dawood: 'She used her husband with heartless cruelty, cursing him a thousand times a day and making his life a burden and a torment. Ma'ruf was a sensitive man, jealous of his good name, and in time he grew to fear her malice and dread her fiery temper' (372). And in Burton: 'She ruled her spouse and abused him; and he feared her malice and dreaded her misdoings; for that he was a sensible man but poor-conditioned' (10: 1).

These adjectives are best read not just as describing interiority but also as statements of exteriority, of her conduct in public that affects his relationship not only with her but with society at large. He is, after all, a good, honourable man: '*li-'annahu kana rajulan 'aqilan yastahi 'ala 'irdihi*', and therefore lets her be, '*wa kanat hakimah 'ala zawjiha wa fi kull yawm tasubbuh wa tal'anuhu alf marrah wa kana yakhsha sharraha wa yakhaf min adhaha*' (6: 653). It is the fear of losing face, of being shamed, disgraced and dishonoured in public that makes him put up with her abuse at home. Once that is out of the bag, or when she shames him in public, he leaves. *Fajirah* must then be read as a synonym of *qalilat al-haya'*, as 'mindless of public disgrace' and *sharraniyyah* of *kathirat al-fitan*, as causing public shame. They must be juxtaposed to his '*aqilan, yastahi 'ala 'irdihi*, which mean not only that he is 'jealous of his good name' (372) as Dawood has it but also that he refrains from conducting himself in any way that would bring dishonour upon himself or those around him. So, as Lyons' translation, 'He is a sensible man, anxious to protect his honour' (3: 690), indicates, honour is the crux of the matter, for it determines his standing in society and gives him power. His love for the princess then makes sense because she maintains his honour against all odds.

Her beauty, only ever described as '*jamila*' and '*dhat husn wa jamal*', terms that depict moral attributes and actions. Here, her actions speak for her moral beauty. When she finds out that Ma'ruf is a penniless cobbler living extravagantly as a wealthy merchant on

borrowed money, including her father's, she helps him. She gives three reasons rendered by Burton as: 'thou art become my husband and I will never transgress against thee'; 'it would be bruited among the folk that I married a man who was a liar, and impostor, and this would smirch mine honour'; and 'Furthermore, an he kill thee, most like he will require me to wed another, and to such thing I will never consent; no, not though I die' (10: 24). These sentiments are repeated in Lyons as 'but I have become your wife and I'm not going to neglect you', 'Then everybody would know that I married a fraud and I would be disgraced', and 'Also, if my father has you killed, he may try to marry me to another man and that is something I shall never accept, even if it costs my life' (3: 708). These disappear in Dawood's translation: 'When she heard the cobbler's story, the Princess burst into a fit of laughter and said: 'Truly, Ma'ruf, you are a subtle rogue! But what are we to do? What will my father say when he learns the truth? The Vizier has already sown suspicions in his mind. He will surely kill you, and I shall die of grief' (390). These reasons are important because they mirror Ma'ruf's notions of honour and marriage as well as the ethical paradigm framing a woman's conduct as a member of society and especially as a wife. Loyalty to and support for a husband are wifely duties and of equal importance to maintaining his honour, therefore, hers. While Zhong's translation (2: 1254) comes very close to Lyons and Burton, Zhi's Chinese translation sums this paradigm up in a four-character expression, '*fu qi yi zhang*' (528), which may be translated as 'we have been husband and wife for a while', which evokes to any Chinese the duties expected of both husband and wife within the institution of marriage.

The addition of '*twei wou qing sheng yi zhung*' (528, you have been loving and loyal towards me' confirms this further, that the responsibility must be mutual. That the princess is Ma'ruf's mirror ethically is accentuated in their juxtaposition to Fatimah al-'Arrah, the transgressor of the ethical paradigm structuring marriage, or the husband and wife

relationship not just between them but in society. This understanding of marriage in Arabic-Islamic culture is easily translated into Chinese and requires no 'domestication', for there is no paradigmatic difference between the two cultures at the ethical level and perhaps even in how ethics are bounded up in aesthetics. Fatimah's physical 'ugliness', as juxtaposed to the Princess's 'beauty', bespeaks her ethical depravity, and the inverse must be said of the Princess, that her physical beauty is a sign of her goodness. The 'inadequacies' of or 'lapses' in English translations, in their turn towards interiority even in Burton, show up the sameness between Arabic-Islamic and Chinese cultures where 'definition' of womanhood is at stake. However, is sameness total?

At the outset, sexuality, acknowledged in Lyons and Dawood and exaggerated in Burton, is completely 'expurgated' in the two Chinese translations. There is no reference to sexuality, let alone sex. This may be part of 'orientalism by proxy' I spoke of earlier. As a masterpiece of world literature, it is given the status equal to a Chinese classic, which is viewed as too lofty for the kind of explicit references to sex so abundant in popular fiction and visual forms of expressions. There may be a 'cultural' difference here. The relative openness of Arabic 'high' literature to treatment of sexuality and sex is not duplicated in Chinese culture. May be? This flagrant omission is, however, less telling of 'cultural' difference than the minute details of language that goes into bringing to life the two female protagonists of the story, into conjuring up in the mind of the reader or listener the image of the two women, all fleshed out and in action. One instance of 'cultural' difference may be located in the visual aesthetics encoded in language that in turn become verbal aesthetics, or, put differently, in the visualizing capacity of language regardless of the subject. There is in art such as a thing as beauty in the portrayal of what would conventionally be known as 'ugly', whether we speak of works that use as their material word, image or sound. The 'grotesque', for example, is all about aesthetics in representation of the abnormal, the ugly.

Let me turn to the ways in which Fatimah comes to life in Chinese. I will focus on the first paragraph of the story that offers characterization of both Maʻruf and Fatimah and, more important their relationship within the ethical framework of marriage I have already discussed.

In his translation of this paragraph, Zhi's Maʻruf is gentle, honest, and works hard every day to support his wife. He puts up with his wife because he does not want his problems to be known. Fatimah is, on the other hand, ill-tempered, vain, greedy for a life of luxury, and loses here temper when she is dissatisfied, and often does not cook for her husband. Zhong's Maʻruf is a humble, knowing his station in life, law abiding and honest, a man who relies on hard work to make a living, spending whatever he makes every day. Fatimah does not treat him like a human being, always nags, and when he does not make enough money she does not care for his health (also reflected in Lyons) and makes him go hungry with an empty stomach. This kind of juxtaposition between Maʻruf and Fatimah is not found in the Arabic original or English translations but makes perfect sense in Chinese. Maʻruf does not deserve what he gets from Fatimah precisely because of his attributes. If he were vain, dishonest (but we know he can be dishonest) and lazy, he would have deserved some one like Fatimah as a wife. Fatimah is a 'bad' wife because she is '*fajirah, sharraniyyah, qalilat al-haya' kathirat al-fitan'* and, above all, because she nags at home non-stop, does not treat him like a human being, and lets him go hungry. More important, she is vain, and vanity is the root of all evil; it is unacceptable in a man let alone a woman, for a woman's vanity is her husband's downfall. However, what bring these two characters to life are the adjectives used to describe the two characters and the adverbs their actions, especially in Zhong's version. This first paragraph of the story conjures up in a few sentences the female dominated relationships in Chinese fiction. The most famous couple is found in a famous 17th century 'low brow' novel known as *Marriage Destiny to Admonish*

the World (*Xing-Shih Yin-Yuan*): Di Xich'en and Xieh Xuchieh. Suchieh's antics, as detailed in the novel, deviate from the 'norm' of behaviour expected of a proper Chinese woman, and she grows more and more mad her physical beauty deteriorates into ugliness.

Her abnormality starts before she is born. She is the reincarnation of a fox fairy seeking revenge from her murderer now reincarnated as Di Xi-ch'en. The night before her wedding, she dreams that her heart is ripped out and replaced by and evil one to serve better the purpose of vengeance. She shocks everyone during her wedding by bawling out the master of ceremony. She then locks the husband out of the bridal chamber three nights in a row, much to the distress of the bridegroom and the parents of both families. He finally uses trickery to consummate the marriage. Soon after the wedding, they get into a quarrel, which turns into a fight. Her husband grabs hold of a whip, which she immediately snatches from him. She then pushes him onto the floor with one hand, sits on his head, and gives him a full beating. She claws, slaps, clubs, and bites. On one occasion, she bites a piece of flesh almost completely off his arm. She interrogates and tortures her husband. Once she ties him to her bed and stabs him with two large needles. Another time she jabs him with and iron tong. A third time she presses his fingers on heated pens. She uses him to feed the mosquitoes in her room. When he escapes to the capital and takes another wife, she dresses up a pet monkey in Di's clothes and clobbers it as if it were the husband. She sponsors a Buddhist ritual for the deceased for her living husband. She tries to use voodoo to murder him too. She shows no respect for her and his parents. When she receives a beating from her mother-in-law, she sets their house on fire. She is responsible for the paralysis of both her mother-in-law and her own father, and eventually for the deaths of all her parents-in-law and parents. When her father-in-law takes in a new concubine, she tries to castrate him in order to prevent the birth of another heir. She uses the reverse sides of the portraits of her deceased in-laws as wallpaper for a shed.

Fatimah is equally evil and mad. Fatimah and Suchieh are twins but each brought up in a different culture, if I may use this kind of analogy to speak of the ways in which cultural domestication takes place in the space of translation that necessarily situates itself in and takes it departure in the linguistic culture of the target language. A story comes to life in a new culture when it can seamlessly integrate into its linguistic culture, become a 'native' sign in a semiological system premised on language and language use. Zhong Si is a good example of success in translation. 'Ma'ruf the Cobbler' reads like a Chinese story that both engages with Chinese ethics and taps into Chinese aesthetics of representation. It evokes at the same a Chinese tradition of similar stories about 'shrews' and their suffering husbands. This is achieved through adding small details that are irrelevant to the 'original' audience but make perfect sense to the 'target' audience. There is much difference in sameness.

VI

Concluding Remarks

In a very popular article on translation,[29] Theo Hermans argues for the injection of the notion of 'thick translation' into the field of translation studies. He borrows the episteme 'thick' from Geertz's 'thick description' and makes a case for translation as a cross cultural encounter and translation studies as cross cultural studies that must reflect the subject position of the translator, the process through which one culture is habilitated into another in translation, and the context within which transfer of conceptual categories takes place across cultures. He gives as examples the discussions surrounding the English translations of Aristotle's *Poetics* and the Chinese *Book of Changes* and observes the following:

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[29] Theo Hermans, 'Cross-cultural translation studies as thick translation', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66: 3 (2003), 380-389.

…firstly, the difficulty and complexity of cross-cultural and historical interpretation, even—perhaps especially—when the exercise is applied to such canonical texts as the *Poetics*; secondly, the fact that this revisionary enterprise is ongoing process reaching into the here and now and extending into the future; thirdly, the inevitability of translation as the companion and instrument of cross-temporal, cross-lingual and cross-cultural interpretation; fourthly, the pertinence of Venuti calls 'domestic representation' and what hermeneuticists might call the interpreter's historicity; and fifthly, the close correlation between differential translations… and changing contexts and agendas.

The particular assumptions and presumptions informing domestic representations allow us to recognize—or to correlate—similarity in what is different and 'other', while at the same time they generate their own forms of dyslexia, enlarging certain aspects or kinds of similarity while creating blind spots elsewhere (382).

Translation must according must be thought of as thick, as in 'thick description' in cultural anthropology that no longer seeks accuracy--for it is impossible—but appreciation for both what is similar and what is different, and in what ways, from what angles, and in what 'respect', all in a self-conscious fashion.

Hermans is here making a case for cross-cultural thick translation studies that will look at the act of translation in a variety of practices in different culture from a comparative perspective. This kind of translation studies 'has the potential to bring about a double dislocation: of the foreign terms and concepts, which are probed by means of an alien methodology and vocabulary, and of the describer's own terminology, which must be wrenched out of shape in order to accommodate both alterity and similarity'. This thick translation 'should be able to counter the flatness and reductiveness of the prevailing jargon of translation studies and their structuralist heritage', avoiding 'the imposition of categories

deriving from one particular paradigm or tradition', and foster a more diversified and imaginative vocabulary', revelled, as it were, 'in the minutiae of individual cases and histories' (386-7). I want to reverse the process of what he proposes, looking at translation of a text, each in its particular cultural, historical, linguistic, and subject-positioning context, and suggest that it would be equally fruitful to look at one moment of intercultural encounter in translation, locating this encounter in the process of thick translation Hermans speaks of. We will see translation as the 'liminal' space where an intercultural encounter is negotiated in order to accommodate both alterity and similarity, each within a particular subjectified cultural, historical, epistemological and linguistic context.

If we do, we will be able steer away from the binary so entrenched in the discussions of cultural exchanges. Power has much to account for, so do the following: how a subject positions her self vis-à-vis her own culture and the other, what language she speaks, how this language imprisons her in an epistemological framework, the historical circumstances she lives in, the field of cultural production she is engaged in, and what her agenda may be in terms of production of knowledge. In the Chinese translations of *The 1001 Nights* I have looked at, power plays little part in shaping the translated text. This applies to the English translations I have looked as well. These English translations, to a great extent, reflect in their own ways the various stages of historical development of the 'West' views of the 'East' through translations of *The 1001 Nights*, from Burton highly exotic and erotic translation that paradoxically embodies Victorian morality, to Dawood's modern exclusive focus on interiority and Lyons's complete anti-Orientalism. All the translations seem to 'struggle' with domesticating alien concepts and ideologies into a language that will be comprehended in their 'native' concepts and ideologies. I wonder how we may refine 'Orientalism', as a theory interrogating the ways in which a culture comes to terms with an other, if we re-examine each European translation of *The 1001 Nights* as 'thick translation'.

VII

Discussion

Évanghélia Stead

La communication de Wen-Chin Ouyang tourne autour de deux questions fondamentales : celle des échanges culturels entre Moyen et Extrême-Orient, *i.e.* entre pays arabes et la Chine, et celle de la traduction des *Mille et Une Nuits* en chinois.

L'auteur réfléchit à partir d'une récente adaptation des *Mille et Une Nuits* parue à Taiwan (Taipei) en 1981, actuellement à sa sixième réimpression (ce qui indique un succès certain), l'ouvrage étant la transposition plutôt radicale (car de structure linéaire, et non plus emboîtée) d'une traduction antérieure des *Nuits* en chinois faite à partir de Burton.

Wen-Chin Ouyang propose de ne plus aborder les rapports interculturels entre pays arabes et Extrême-Orient par le biais du prisme de l'Orientalisme occidental (*i.e.* théorie du dominant-dominé, ou coloniseur-colonisé d'Edward Saïd et ses dérivés et corollaires), mais à travers une perspective multiculturelle inverse, à construire à partir des espaces multiculturels, soumis à l'hétéroglossie et aux croisements polyethniques, issus de la décolonisation et propres au XXe siècle. Elle propose par la suite l'étude détaillée de deux traductions chinoises et d'une traduction anglaise du conte de Maruf le cordonnier, choisi parce que son intrigue thématise le problème même de l'acclimatation en milieu étranger. Deux ensembles d'éléments relevant l'un du religieux, l'autre du culturel, montrent en quoi la traduction peut rendre compte à la fois de la différence et de la ressemblance. La différence se lit par exemple dans l'impossible transposition du monothéisme dans la culture chinoise et l'emploi dans la traduction d'une série de termes très différents de ceux de l'original. La ressemblance en revanche (le paradigme éthique qui structure le mariage de Maruf avec la princesse et la séparation d'avec la mégère, sa première femme) trouve aisément place dans la culture chinoise comme l'indique la comparaison de la description de Maruf et de la mégère dans la

traduction avec celle des protagonistes comparables d'un roman chinois populaire du XVIIe siècle, la sexualité – importante dans la culture arabe – étant toutefois expurgée de la version chinoise.

La traduction réussie est ainsi pour Wen-Chin Ouyang celle qui trouve un écho dans l'éthique et l'esthétique du public ciblé – la différence dans la similitude entraînant une série de petits ajouts au texte, absents de l'original mais nécessaires à l'adhésion du lecteur étranger. Wen-Chin Ouyang conclut sur le principe de «traduction épaisse» (*thick translation*) en tant que moyen souple de médiation.

Cette communication permet tout d'abord de revenir sur les échanges entre deux grandes civilisations, très assidus d'un point de vue commercial depuis le IXe siècle, comme on sait [30], mais mystérieux du point de vue culturel, faute de traces existantes et/ou de recherches qui auraient permis de porter des documents à la lumière. Le fait que pendant longtemps les échanges culturels et littéraires ont nécessairement été le fait du prince dans ce domaine repose de manière aiguë la question du *pouvoir*, que nous avons rencontrée dès l'ouverture de nos travaux. La manière dont Wen-Chin Ouyang pose cette question dans les nouveaux espaces politiques et culturels issus de la décolonisation permet, bien entendu, d'y revenir autrement, comme le montrent ces phrases : «Que nous soyons puissants ou dépourvus de pouvoir, nous ne voulons pas toujours dominer l'autre ; nous voulons parfois céder au pouvoir, ou à l'allure de l'autre, même si l'autre est sans pouvoir.»

En même temps, il est clair que l'absence de recherches suffisantes et/ou de résultats limite la portée et le poids des paradigmes ou des arguments purement théoriques puisque les preuves permettant de les affirmer, de les infirmer ou simplement de les nuancer, font défaut. La construction d'un autre point de vue, proprement oriental, nourrit autrement la réflexion et

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[30] Cf. *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, ed. by Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, with the collaboration of Hassan Wassouf, Santa Barbara, Calif., ABC-CLIO, [© 2004], vol. II, p. 521-522.

l'on ne peut que souhaiter que des travaux comme celui de Yuriko Yamanaka sur Alexandre

le Grand, qui confronte les écrits médiévaux arabes et persans mais du point de vue

japonais [31], se multiplient. Dans le cas précis de la traduction des *Mille et Une Nuits* en

chinois, à la fois en Chine et à Taiwan, quelques repères sûrs concernant ces traductions, leur

modèle, source, ou audience semblent nécessaires, ainsi qu'une clarification : est-il possible

que les *Mille et Une Nuits* soient uniquement considérées comme des récits pour enfants en

Chine ? N'existe-t-il pas en parallèle une réception adulte de ces récits, réservée à un public

plus restreint, néanmoins existant ?

Par ailleurs, la construction d'un point de vue différencié, décentré, multiethnique et

polyglotte, pour nécessaire qu'elle soit, ne permet peut-être pas assez à la distance critique de

s'installer par rapport aux produits mixtes dérivés précisément d'une culture globale ou

mondiale. Par exemple, le *Ah La Puo*, cette publication récente sur l'histoire et la civilisation

arabe, qui porte le titre de *Mille et Une Nuits* et dont l'article montre bien qu'il découle d'une

culture occidentalisée, mobilisant des clichés outranciers sur le monde arabe, n'est-il tout de

même pas *aussi* spécialement destiné à la communauté culturelle multiethnique et polyglotte

que Wen-Chin prend à témoin pour la construction du nouveau point de vue qu'elle postule ?

Comment établir le point de vue critique dans ce cas ? Par rapport à quoi?

Enfin, deux conceptions du comparatisme semblent se faire concurrence dans cet

article : un comparatisme anglophone, mondialiste, enclin à la théorie, voire limité à la

théorisation de la littérature, et un comparatisme de terrain, plus souple et plus sensible, fondé

sur l'étude des langues, la spécialisation par aires linguistiques et culturelles, ainsi que l'étude

précise des textes, qui ne boude pour autant ni la nécessité de la théorisation ni le

questionnement interdisciplinaire. La dernière partie de l'article de Wen-Chin Ouyang et son

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[31] Yuriko Yamanaka, *The Allegoresis of Alexander the Great in the Classical Age of Islam* [*Gūi to shiteno Alekusandorosu : Isurāmu kotenki no shinko to rekishi ishiki ni oite*], thèse de doctorat, Université de Tokyo, 2007, en japonais ; sous presse,

étude précise des différentes versions, débouchant sur des considérations théoriques, est à mes yeux très proche du second. Ce comparatisme-là, nécessairement plus philologique, attaché à la recherche précise et à la confrontation des éléments, serait le plus apte à tenter de répondre aux questions posées par l'article. Il correspond davantage à la discipline de littérature comparée telle qu'elle est pratiquée en France. Ce point de vue est-il partagé par l'auteur?

VIII

Afterword

Little research has been done on *The 1001 Nights* in Chinese, despite the historical relations between China and the world of Islam, and the popularity of the *Nights* among the Chinese reading public. The reasons are not immediately apparent. The reception of *Nights'* in Chinese is an interesting area of inquiry because it marks the beginning of a new way of cross cultural interaction between China and the Middle East at the turn of the twentieth century, this time mediated by a third party, certainly Europe and perhaps even Japan. At the same time, it points to translation as an important site of cultural encounter, of the migration of worldviews from one culture to another, here negotiated in language. However, the nature of the third party mediation remains relatively unknown. Is there an 'adult' (pornographic) tradition of *The 1001 Nights* in Chinese, as in English and Japanese, for example? This is one obvious question that does not have an answer yet. In addition, the sources and dates of Chinese translations cannot be pinned down. These all present challenges to using Chinese translations of *The 1001 Nights* to issues relevant to processes of cultural exchange. Is social etiquette picked up from Burton or Bulaq? Does a Chinese translation reflect developing modern sensibilities, which are glimpsed in a comparative look at Burton, Dawood and Layons? And, how important is class (whether of the translator or implied reader) in the final

shape of translation? Looking after husband's health through cooking is more likely a middle class sentiment. Upper class Chinese women do not have to cook, for they have cooks and servants to take care of all their domestic chores.

This said, even a tentative comparative analysis of translations rendered in two different languages points to an area of distortion that occurs in one thick semiological system's attempt to comprehend, interpret, domesticate and express another culture, equally grounded in a thick system of thought and tradition of expression. This distortion may easily be located outside the dialectics of self and other that, informed by power, lead to misrepresentation. Cultural encounters must be grappled from multiple perspectives and examined through a diverse body of sources. Terms like *Ah La Puo* recurrent in contemporary Chinese writing are but one source of information. It demonstrates that the Chinese, like the rest of the world, know the Arab World as a 'nation' occupying a finite parcel of land in the Middle East in the twentieth century. This awareness of one of the contemporary Arab self-definitions does not necessarily exonerate the Chinese from misrepresentation (one may say benign Orientalism in this case), for the Middle East remains a very vague 'non-China' to all Chinese regardless of where they live (China, Taiwan, Hong Kong or 'diaspora'). The Chinese misrepresentation of the Arab world is clearly not driven by their will to dominate the Arabs. The question of representation and its attendant misrepresentation must remain open after *Orientalism*, for any theory of cross-cultural representation must take into consideration, in addition to discourse's relationship to power, the very structure of thought embedded in the language underpinning the discourse.